

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 AID-05 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02

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TAGS: ELAB, NI

SUBJECT: LABOR UNREST CONTINUES

REF: (A) LAGOS 544; (B) LAGOS 593

SUMMARY: DOCTORS AND BANK WORKERS HAVE RETURNED TO WORK, BUT NEW DISPUTES CROPPING UP DAILY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR TO TEST FMG METTLE. PRECEDENTS SET IN STRIKES TO DATE HAVE ENCOURAGED WORKERS TO UNDERTAKE INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS AND HAVE RAISED SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT FMG HANDLING OF UDOJI AWARDS AND THEIR AFTERMATH. END SUMMARY

1. STRIKE BY GOVERNMENT DOCTORS (REF A) ENDED JANUARY 21 AFTER FMG AWARDED CONSIDERABLE SALARY BOOST TO DOCTORS THROUGH "CLARIFICATION" OF NEW GRADINGS AFFECTING PROFESSIONALS IN CIVIL SERVICE. NIGERIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OBTAINED ADDITIONAL PROMISE THAT FMG WOULD GIVE FURTHER CONSIDERATION TO DOCTORS' COMPLAINTS, BUT THREATENED FURTHER "INDUSTRIAL ACTION" IN MARCH IF THESE NOT SATISFIED.

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2. BANKS ALSO REOPENED JANUARY 21 AS NATIONAL UNION OF NIGERIAN BANK EMPLOYEES (NUNBE) CALLED OFF INDUSTRIAL ACTION (REF B) AT REQUEST OF LABOR MINISTRY. MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS INSIST THAT BANKS HELD FIRM ON REFUSAL TO NEGOTIATE WHILE WORK DISRUPTION CONTINUED AND WERE SUPPORTED IN THIS POSITION BY FMG, THUS FORCING UNION TO CAPITULATE. HOWEVER, UNIONS REPORTEDLY SET 48-HOUR DEADLINE FOR SATISFACTORY COMPLETION OF NEGOTIATIONS, AND LATEST REPORT SUGGESTS STRIKE MAY RESUME JANUARY 24 OR 27 IF THEIR DEMANDS NOT FULLY MET.

3. WHILE THESE TWO ISSUES AT LEAST TEMPORARILY SETTLED, RASH OF OTHER INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS INVOLVING UDOJI SETTLEMENTS ARE EITHER THREATENED OR ACTUALLY TAKING PLACE. SEVERAL FIRMS IN PRIVATE SECTOR HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY WORKERS DEMANDING WAGE BOOSTS AND ARREARS, WHILE IN PUBLIC SECTOR JUNIOR STAFF WORKERS OPERATING LAGOS WATER WORKS WALKED OUT JANUARY 20 BECAUSE ARREARS NOT PAID PROMPTLY ENOUGH. AMONG THREATENED ACTIONS, POTENTIALLY MOST SERIOUS IS 72-HOUR ULTIMATUM BY UNIONS COVERING NIGERIAN ELECTRICAL POWER AUTHORITY (NEPA), WHICH EXPIRES JANUARY 23. FMG ALSO BEING CHALLENGED BY STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL TECHNICAL COLLEGES, WHO HAVE ABANDONED CAMPUSES IN PROTEST AT ALLEGED DOWNGRADING OF TECHNICAL PERSONNEL IN UDOJI REALIGNMENT OF CIVIL SERVICE POSITIONS.

4. COMMENT: THUS FAR, FMG HAS DEALT WITH UDOJI-RELATED STRIKE ACTIONS ON BRUSHFIRE BASIS, AND SEEMINGLY LACKS CLEAR-CUT POLICY DECISION ON HOW SITUATION SHOULD BE HANDLED. PRECEDENTS SET BY INITIAL EMPLOYEE VICTORIES WILL ENCOURAGE OTHER WORKERS TO USE STRIKE WEAPON AS MEANS OF OBTAINING SATISFACTION, WHETHER DEMANDS INVOLVE REGRADING IN PUBLIC SECTOR OR WAGE INCREASE ON PRIVATE SIDE. SPECIFIC CASES OF DOCK AND BANK STRIKES HAVE ALSO SERVED TO STRENGTHEN HAND OF MORE RADICAL UNION LEADERS WHO EXPLOITED STRIKE ACTION IN THEIR INTRAUNION STRUGGLES WITH RELATIVE MODERATES WHILE LATTER EITHER REMAINED ON SIDELINES OR URGED MORE PEACEFUL NEGOTIATING PROCESS.

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5. HANDLING OF DOCTORS' STRIKE AND WALK-OUT AT WATER WORKS ALSO REFLECTED FMG FAILURE TO UNDERTAKE EFFECTIVE PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM REGARDING UDOJI AWARDS. BELATED "CLARIFICATION" WHICH HAS GOTTEN DOCTORS BACK TO WORK COULD AS WELL HAVE BEEN PART OF INITIAL PACKAGE, WHILE SUPPOSED DELAY IN ARREARS PAYMENT AT WATER WORKS IS SIMPLY CASE OF TOTAL MISUNDERSTANDING

BY WORKERS INVOLVED.

6. FMG HAS NOW CREATED UNFORTUNATE IMPRESSION OF WEAKNESS IN DEALING WITH WORKERS DEMANDS AND OF WILLINGNESS TO BUY OFF PROTESTING UNIONS SO AS TO AVOID DISRUPTION OF VITAL SERVICES. PROSPECT IS FOR SEVERAL MONTHS OF TURMOIL IN BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS AS FMG ATTEMPTS TO PLACATE ALL WITH OIL WEALTH. IF GOVERNMENT MAINTAINS THIS POLICY, HOWEVER, COUNTRY COULD END UP WITH ALL WORKERS IN SAME RELATIVE POSITION AS BEFORE THOUGH ON SUBSTANTIALLY HIGHER SALARY SCALES, WITH INFLATION EATING AWAY THEIR TEMPORARY GAINS. SUCH SITUATION WOULD NOT ONLY UNDERMINE REFORM ASPECTS OF ORIGINAL UDOJI PROPOSALS, BUT COULD ALSO ERODE POPULAR SUPPORT FOR FMG UNLESS REGIME TAKES EFFECTIVE ACTION IN THIS AND OTHER FIELDS TO RESTORE SOME OF ITS FADING LUSTER.
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